

Newsletter for Birdwatchers

Vol. 39

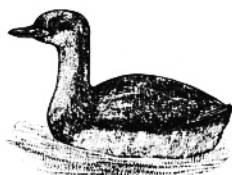
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Editorial

Excellent research on jacanas

All of us have seen bronze-winged jacanas, (*Metopidius indicus*) and know that they have long toes which enable them to walk on floating vegetation, and hence are called Lilly Trotters. We also know that they are polyandrous, each

female mating with many males, and foisting domestic duties, incubation and feeding the young on them, a reversal of the normal role of the sexes.

But in a remarkable piece of research Stuart Butchart of Cambridge has discovered facts hitherto unknown, and his article in Black Buck, Vol. 4 Number 2 makes fascinating reading. He spent 15 months between '95 to '97 studying these waterbirds in a fresh water lake Vembanurkulam in Kanyakumari Dist. and data was collected over three breeding seasons, mid-May to mid-October, in these years.

The author says that out of the 9000 bird species of the world only 20 species are polyandrous. In the case of the bronze-winged jacana, the females are 60% heavier than the males and this enables them to be the dominant partner in the business of living. By colour marking with rings on the legs, the author was able to identify most of the 40-60 individuals which were present in the lake at any one time. He identified the territory over which each bird held its own. "Each time I identified an individual from its leg-rings, I plotted its position on a map and determined territory boundaries by drawing a polygon around the outermost points when I had obtained at least 90 such registrations."

During his studies, Stuart Butchart recorded the calls of the males and females, and he discovered that the males yell in a particular way to attract females when they wished to copulate with a female. "Males which incubated the clutch ceased yelling whilst they had eggs and chicks to guard, while the other males in the harem continued to yell to attract the female during these periods". Field research is hard work but how exciting to discover facts which were there are along-waiting to be discovered.

"Birds of the Indian Subcontinent"

I am now the proud owner (through a gift) of this book by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp which will possibly become the leading field guide for people of our subcontinent. Even those making a bus journey to Lahore could take this along, for like the old classic by Ripley & Salim Ali it covers Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sikkim and Sri Lanka. What a pleasure to disregard political boundaries for once. But one would need strong arms to carry this book in the field. Its 888 pages (as against 737 of R & SA) is amazingly heavy, physically, not mentally. It is only 3/4 the size of the much used Compact Edition of R & SA, but twice as heavy. Perhaps the quality of the paper makes the difference. The stiff price Rs. 2,000/= plus, will restrict its distribution, but perhaps there will be quite a few who will (as in the case of my benefactor) allow enthusiasm to overcome prudence.

There are 153 colour plates illustrating all the 1295 species of birds presently known, as against the 1200 of the Handbook by R & SA. There are, in many cases, several illustrations of the same species - of the female, juvenile, and

in flight. The illustrations are by some of the best artists of the world including our Carl D'Silva. I was also happy to see that Shahid Ali, a great-grand-nephew of Salim Ali was one of the Collaborators. The illustrations are superb and will help to clear and confirm many doubtful identification in the field.

The pattern of this guide is the standard one : Facing each illustrated page is a brief description of the birds with their common English and scientific name, and their areas of distribution. I am told that the maps of distribution of species are not too accurate, but no book is entirely perfect. The common names have been selected from several current sources, on the basis of what seemed most appropriate and logical to the authors. Thus the king vulture of old is transformed into the red-headed vulture. This is a pity because people like me who may look at the index of common names may think that the king has become extinct. Luckily the scientific name *Sarcogyps calvus* has not been changed-yet.

While I was editing the two articles in this Newsletter, relating to the green munia (*Estrilda formosa*) this book arrived and I saw that on the spine of the jacket was the picture of the male and female green munia. It is worth noting that the two authors have different views about the usefulness of the lantana for the green munia. I read the para in my new acquisition and compared it with that in the Compact edition. I was glad to see that the description by Grimmett *et al* are not just a slightly altered copy of Salim Ali (as many writings are) but looks at the bird from a fresh angle. So it is going to be a great pleasure comparing the texts of the two volumes. But as far as the printing, illustrations and production are concerned the new book is very superior. Finally what pleased me specially were the several references to the Newsletter for Birdwatchers. It makes us feel that it has arrived.

Web of Death

Readers will recall the article by Anish Andheria (Vol. 38 No. 5) about flycatcher caught in the web of a spider in the Borivili National Park. Doubts were expressed about the capacity of a spider to deal with such a large victim. But there has now been confirmation from Atul Dhamankar (Patel High School, Shivaji Chowk, Chandrapur, 412 402, Maharashtra) that the Giant Wood Spider can actually kill and feed on a bird. On 25th October 98 he "saw a bird fly across and dash (into) some invisible thing and hang in the air". He found it to be a plain wren warbler trying desperately to release itself from the web without success. Ultimately the spider "penetrated its jaws into (the) neck of (the) warbler and injected his venom into it". Presumably after the venom had dissolved the tissues

of the bird, the spider made a meal of it. Strange that so few such examples of birds and spiders have come to our notice.

Hints to Contributors

Do not use words whose meanings are not clear to you. Use simple words instead of obscure and complicated ones.

Do not mix several ideas in the same sentence. Each sentence must have one clear idea; and each para must consist of sentences supporting a central idea. There should not be too much diversity in the statements made.

You will be surprised to see how much better your writing becomes by merely removing a few words. Let me give you an example from an article I have received. The author writes:

"All our birds visits to this unique wetland habitat have been very rewarding indeed and memorable"

Remove only a few words and see the result :

"All our visits to this unique wetland have been very rewarding".



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New Breeding Colony of Painted Storks near Sira

AMEEN AHMED, Wildlife Aware Nature Club, Nisarga Layout, Tumkur 572 103

A large breeding colony of the endangered painted storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and grey herons (*Ardea cinerea*) has been identified at Kaggaladu, a small village in Tumkur district, by bird watchers of Wildlife Aware Nature Club (WANC), an NGO working for wildlife conservation in Karnataka. Kaggaladu is about 9 kms to the north-west of Sira town (58 kms from Tumkur City on National Highway No. 4). These beautiful birds have been building nests and raising their young on the few tamarind trees in the village for the past 5 years.



According to a preliminary survey conducted by Gundappa, B.V., Halesh, Dr. Ameen Ahmed, Guru Prasad, T.V.N. Murthy, Dr. Mahesh G.S., Nandeesh, Prasanna. D.R., Venkatesh, U & Chandrashekar, U., about 121 nests of painted storks and 31 nests of grey herons have been counted. There are mixed nests of both the species on 3 trees. On 5 trees only painted storks breed and on one tree the grey herons breed exclusively. During the evenings the number of painted storks and grey herons swell to more than 600 as they are joined by birds which come to roost. Incidentally a couple of grey pelicans (*Pelecanus philippensis*) another bird on the

verge of extinction have also been found to roost in these trees. Five trees belong to the state government & four trees are privately owned. The survey has found that the birds use the big tanks lying within a radius of 20 kms from the village, like Kalambella tank, Chikkasandra tank, Andenahalli tank, Changavara tank & the nearby Kaggaladu big tank, to feed.

It has been found that the villagers eagerly protect the birds and take to task any one who tries to harm them. Incidentally this village is probably among the largest breeding sites of painted storks in Karnataka after the famous Kokkre Bellur village of Maddur taluk in Mandya District.

According to the villagers, the grey herons have been nesting in a single tree for the past six years. Their numbers increased about three years ago when a lone tree in the neighbouring Madakanahalli which also had their nests was disturbed by poachers and many birds were butchered. The painted storks have been nesting here for the past three years. Earlier they used to nest on the four tamarind trees in the centre of the village on the Sira-Changavara main road. Due to the protection offered by the villagers their numbers increased and this year they have included four more tamarind trees for breeding. The grey herons also have used one more tamarind for breeding. The villagers are so interested in conserving the birds that since last year they have prevented the government authorities from auctioning the tamarind harvest, as this would scare away the birds. The villagers believe the birds are harbingers of rain and prosperity and hence they protect them.

WANC has written to the Karnataka Forest Minister, the Chief Wildlife Warden and the local Divisional forest officer to ensure protection to these birds from outsiders as they are highly endangered and come under Schedule I of the wildlife protection Act (1972). WANC is monitoring the entire region to identify more nesting sites of the birds so that suitable protection is afforded to them. WANC is creating awareness about wildlife among the villagers of the area particularly among school children by giving illustrated slide shows and film shows.



Some Suggestions for Long-time Sustenance of the Nascent Breeding Colony of Painted Storks near Sira



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On learning about the discovery of the nascent breeding colony of painted storks *Mycteria leucocephala* and grey herons *Ardea cinerea* from Dr Ameen Ahmed of WANC, we visited the colony with Dr Ameen Ahmed and other members

of WANC on 17th and 19th March 1999. We went round the colony and the wetlands frequented by the storks and herons and we offer the following suggestions for long time sustenance of the colony.

At the outset we wish to stress that Kaggaladu village has to be declared as a Bird Sanctuary by the Forest Department, and sign boards explaining the salient features of the birds, their nesting cycle and their conservation importance, should be put up at vantage points. The authorities should post a forest watcher round the clock to monitor and prevent any poachers from climbing the trees and collecting the birds, their nestlings and eggs. A local protection committee has to be formed and volunteers drawn from the Village Panchyat, the Forest Department, the Revenue Department, the Irrigation Department, the Fisheries Department, the Local School, the Village Leaders, the NGOs, Conservation Experts and members of Wildlife Awareness Nature Club of Tumkur, among others.

The Committee may be suitably named and empowered to undertake certain immediate tasks as are indicated :

Explore the possibilities of planting more trees for providing more nesting opportunities not only for painted storks but also for pelicans over a period of time; to provide a suitable enclosure and take up the rearing programme for the young birds that accidentally fall from the trees and become a prey to stray dogs and feral cats; to conduct periodic awareness programmes in the village and also for visitors and provide pamphlets highlighting the salient features of the breeding colony; to spruce up the park which is in a bad shape and provide a Visitor Centre in this park and collect a nominal entry fee and camera fee from visitors and use the revenue thus generated for various development activities; to provide plastic sleeves for the overhead electric wires, that are criss-crossing the nesting trees. This is essential to prevent the birds from getting accidentally electrocuted when they come in contact with the live wires while landing and taking off from the nests. A garbage dump is presently located below the main nesting tree. Often the garbage dump is set afire and the smoke emanating from this causes hazards to the nesting birds. A suitable strategy to relocate this garbage dump should be taken up immediately.

It is reported that feral cats have often harassed the nesting birds by climbing the trees. Also the Bonnet monkeys that are present in the surrounding areas might raid the nesting trees and pillage the eggs. In the resulting commotion the eggs and nestling are likely to drop to the ground fatally. Effective steps should be taken to prevent the monkeys and cats from entering the colony. Since the colony is adjacent to the school, a board may be put up for prominently displaying the details such as the number of birds, nests, young ones, date of arrival, peak breeding season, incubation period, chick mortality and other details for the benefit of visitors. Students should be encouraged to watch and record their observations as above and their findings may be reviewed by experts and published in scientific and popular periodicals. Efforts to get sponsors such as Rotary and Lions Club for development of the colony and the village and providing vocational training to the deserving villagers and conducting free medical camps, etc., must be explored. Two incidents of poaching of birds in the colony have been reported three weeks earlier, but the

culprits were let off after stern warning. We learnt from the villagers that a grey heron breeding colony existed in the adjoining Madakanahalli and Narayankere villages. But three years ago, some poachers came from nowhere and started shooting down the herons. The herons have ever since deserted the colony.

Table 1

ASIAN MIDWINTER WATERFOWL CENSUS RESULTS 1990-96

Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)

Extracted from Publications of AWB, IWRB and Wetlands International

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Andhra Pradesh	89	283	98	508	121	818	2560
Bihar	6	7		26			
Delhi	36	372	108	8	1	1	
Gujarat	843	1442	791	682	678	945	826
Karnataka	121	382	361	1601	704	84	496
Madhya Pradesh	14	14	15	23			
Maharashtra	85	11	41	64	59		
Orissa	62	224	264	966	312	469	772
Punjab	600	500	6	33	3		
Rajasthan	144	376	17	870	123	87	
Tamilnadu	385	926	365	611	155	87	270
Uttar Pradesh	74	62	75	62	21	72	
Diu UT	3		9	2			
Goa			14				
Haryana	1		31			70	
Assam				3			
Kerala				1	5	1	11
Pondicherry				32		26	39
Himachal Pradesh	10				2	2	
West Bengal	1				1		
Tripura	1						
Totals							
India	2474	4599	2195	5492	2185	2662	4934
Sri Lanka	1303	659	563	345	237	965	1127
Pakistan		18	58	32			
Nepal			11				
Mayanmar			4				
Thailand			4	1			1
Cambodia				31			
Vietnam	119			40			
Grand Total							
South Asia	3777	5276	2827	5869	2422	3627	6061
South East Asia	119		8	72		1	1

Painted Stork Population Estimate

Southern Asia - <15,000 Probably Declining
Ramsar Criteria of 1% = 150 Painted Storks

Southeastern Asia - <10,000 Declining

Source : Waterfowl Population Estimates,
Wetland International Publication - 44/1997

The Committee may make suitable steps to provide round the clock vigilance. Poaching is rampant in the wetlands which are the feeding centres. The ritual hunting season coincides with the breeding season of grey herons and the arrival of painted storks for breeding to Kaggaladu. We have just learnt that the painted storks are present throughout the

year. The hunters of Kelagal Seemae are well known for their hunting prowess, therefore, effective steps may be taken by the authorities and the Committee to constantly monitor the network of wetlands frequented by the storks and other waterfowl. Fishing rights for most of the tanks are being auctioned and the lessees may not be happy to loose their harvests to these birds. Sometimes the fisherman - bird conflict results in the latter loosing their lives. Therefore, fishing operations may be regulated and the practice of leasing the fishing rights may be dispensed with; atleast in two or three tanks, which are important for the storks and herons. This is a must for ensuring the long time survival of the colony. Two or three tamarind trees used by the birds belong to some villagers. The owners should be identified and adequately compensated for their yeild loss. Periodical monitoring of water quality, for determining the pollution levels should be taken up and efforts should be made to divert the flow of sewage from the neighbouring villages and towns to these

wetlands. The authorities should discourage dumping of garbage and debris in and around the wetlands. Human activities in these wetlands should be minimised, especially during peak breeding season. Quarrying activities in a 10 km radius is detrimental to the interest of the birds. Since the colony is still at its formulative stages, quarrying activities should be minimised if not ceased; otherwise the birds might desert the colony.

Use of air horns by the vehicles, use of loudspeakers, beating of drums and bursting of crackers during festivities cause insecurity among the birds and they may eventually desert the colony. Sincere efforts should be made to ban such practices. The current population estimate of painted stork is less than 15,000 individuals in South Asia and less than 10,000 in South-eastern Asia. This colony merits the Ramsar criteria of 1% = 150 individuals. (see Table 1).



Because of the political and social upheavals in Kashmir Valley since 1989, the valley and therefore the Dachigam National Park have received little attention by conservationists and ornithologists. Keeping in view the need for surveying the natural areas in the valley, in June 1998, our survey team consisting of three wildlifers namely Junaid Nazir, Intesar Suhail, and I decided to make an ornithological survey of Dachigam National Park (DNP). We received the permission and all the necessary guidelines from Mr. Rashid Naquash, Wildlife Warden, Headquarters, Srinagar and settled for a three days programme. As camping inside the park was not allowed, we decided to shuttle from Alamgaribazar, Jundaids house which is at a distance of 20 kms from the park.

On 20th June 1998, at exactly 08:00 hrs we started bird watching from the main gate itself. The first few birds we came across were : common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), golden oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), house crow (*Corvus splendens*), jackdaw (*Corvus monedula*), black bulbul (*Hypsipetes madagascariensis*) tickell's thrush (*Turdus unicolor*), Indian ring dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), grey tit (*Parus major*) and whitecheeked bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucogenys*).

We proceeded observing birds on both sides of the metalled road. The most interesting species was a redbilled blue magpie (*Cissa erythrorhyncha*) inspecting an abandoned nest on kikkar (*Rhus sp.*) at 20 metres off the road on the left side. On the right side of the road was another individual, possibly its mate, flying from branch to branch among *Rhus* and maple trees.

Birds in Dachigam National Park

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The metalled road led us towards the Fish Breeding Farm (FBF) at a distance of around one and a half kilometers from the gate. In the lawn of FBF are various ponds maintained for rearing Trout of different age groups. We sighted a white-breasted kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) on top of a pond wall looking for the opportunity to dive for fish. On the other side were two yellow wagtails (*Motacilla flava*) and one white or pied wagtail (*Motacilla alba*) foraging among the flowering beds laid along the lawn. The FBF is bordered on the right by a *nalla* called Dagwan canal providing suitable habitat for riverine species. The *nalla* originates from the famous high altitude Marsar lake in upper Dachigam, and flows through almost the whole park.

At a distance of around 3 km from the FBF at Drophama is a VIP Rest House. It is here that both the metalled road and heavy vehicle disturbance (due to ministers and bureaucrats coming to feast at the Rest House and FBF) comes to an end. At 11.30 hrs we reached the gate of the rest house and heard a drumming sound from a nearby *Aesculus indica* tree (locally called Handun) and, sighted a pair of Himalayan pied woodpeckers (*Picoides himalayensis*) pecking for insects on the middle canopy branch of the tree. Focussing my binoculars, I caught sight of another species, the male brownfronted pied woodpecker (*Picoides auriceps*). At the same time Suhail spotted one more species and at first we mistook it for a house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) but while scanning the area for some new findings, it again came into focus. Fortunately, it seemed to be distinct from the house sparrow by its bright rufous upper plumage and black chin.

We referred to the "Pictorial Guide" and the "Handbook" of Indian birds" and it turned to be the cinnamon tree sparrow (*Passer rutilans*)

At 12.00 hrs we started afresh towards the black bear area along a bridle path north of the rest house. The area on both sides of the track is surrounded by fruit trees, dominant among them being three species of cherry (*Prunus armeniaca*) (locally called *glass kul*, *goddaul kul* and *ailcha kul*) and *Morus alba* locally called *tul kul*. These fruit trees are interspersed by the *Rhus* spp. At one point on the track, we took a right turn and walking some distance, we came across a fast flowing stream. We sat on a rock on the bank of the nalla to enjoy the sight of a white breasted dipper (*Cinclus cinclus*). Suddenly, I spotted a blue whistling thrush (*Myiophonus caeruleus*) moving on the boulders along the opposite side of the nalla. The bird locally called *kustoor* was carrying nest material (grass) in its bill to the nest site situated among the boulders on the bank of the canal. We would also see a river chat (*Chaimarromis leucocephala*) and a plumbeous redstart (*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*) basking on the boulders on the bank. Meanwhile, Suhail saw a group of black faced langur (*Presbytes entelus*) gliding among tall and broadleaved trees on the opposite side on the canal.

Coming back to the track and among the dense bushes of *Rhus* and fruit trees of *Morus alba* and *Prunus armeniaca*, we saw two black bears, one actively browsing on the top of a *Morus alba*. The second one was busy devouring whatever was available on the understory, and its body was fully covered with cobweb.

Walking further north, the woodland gave way to the mountainous tall grassland habitat where we saw greyheaded bunting (*Emberiza fucata*), about 20 in number. At 16:30 hrs we reached the main gate of the park and decided to call it a day.

The next day we started at 08:45 hrs and decided to go into the interior of the park. The interior contains dense vegetation dominated by trees of populus, willow (*Salix* spp.) *Rhus* spp., and walnut (*Juglans regia*), a woodland habitat. Among the birds were rufous turtle dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) whitebrowed blue flycatcher (*Muscicapa supercilialis*) green backed tit (*Parus monticolus*) house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) largebilled leaf warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*), and plain leaf warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*). We also had a glimpse of a big owl roosting camouflaged on an old willow tree. But by the time we would focus our binocular it got alerted and flew into a densely foliated tree. Further interior comes a *nalla* (tributary of Dagwan canal) flowing along the eastern boundary of the park. It provides a habitat for the brown dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*) and paradise flycatcher (*Terpsiphone Paradisi*). Walking along the *nalla* and then taking a right turn. we found ourselves back on the metalled road. We walked through the shrubs bordering the canal and recognized a spotted forktail (*Enicurus maculatus*). At about 12:30 hrs we stopped for lunch on the canal bank.

At 13:00 hrs we started towards the coniferous habitat north east of the canal. It starts with a few pinus trees interspersed by the cherry, *Tul kul* and walnut trees and is followed by an abundance of conifers, blue pine and deodar. Since it was mid day, bird activity was low and we could not see any new species except a sparrow hawk (*Accipiter nisus*) perching in the middle canopy of a pine tree twenty meters left of the tack. At 15:00 hrs, we started to return and by 16:00 hrs, we left the park. Walking towards the bus-stand, we fortunately caught sight of a flock of ducks roosting in the Harwan Reservoir, beside the Harwan-Dhara main road. The reservoir which supplies water to the famous gardens of Kashmir such as Harwan is included in the Dachigam National Park. The sighting of these ducks was exciting and in order to see them closely we approached a vantage point (on top of the water gauge) on the elevated boundary of Harwan garden. The species present were; pintail (*Anas acuta*) cotton teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*), dabchick (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) and coot (*Fulica atra*). The sight of these ducks in the breeding season was quite unusual.

On the third day we started at 08:40 hrs, and we went towards the area occupied by the Sheep Breeding Farm (approximately 3 sq. km) along the north-west boundary of Lower Dachigam. Two habitats are noticed in this area; a woodland habitat dominated by *Rhus* and *Morus alba* followed by *Prunus armeniaca* and a habitat dominated with bushes of *Rosa brunonii*, *Rhus* and *Eltis* sp. interspersed with *Morus alba* and *Rhus* trees. We walked through the whole area and the additional species seen and heard were; the cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), small cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*), hoopoe (*Upupa epops*), rufous backed shrike (*Lanius schach*), grey drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*), rufous-tailed flycatcher (*Muscicapa ruficauda*). The most interesting sighting was a pair of Kashmir redbreasted flycatchers (*Muscicapa subrubra*) making sallies for insects and returning to perch on the lower canopy of the *Rhus* tree.

With this we completed our preliminary survey of lower Dachigam. Almost two-third of the total area of lower Dachigam was covered in this survey and the complete checklist of bird species recorded is given in the table.

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List of Birds seen in Dachigam National Park (Lower) between July 20 to July 22

Common Name	Scientific Name	Common Name	Scientific Name
Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	Redbilled blue magpie	<i>Cissa erythrorhyncha</i>
Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Jackdaw	<i>Corvus monedula</i>
Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	Jungle crow	<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>
Cotton teal	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	Longtailed minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>
Blackeared kite	<i>Milvus migrans lineatus</i>	Whitecheeked bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>
Sparrow-hawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Black bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>
Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>	Streaked laughing thrush	<i>Garrulax lineatus</i>
Blue rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	Rufoustailed flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ruficauda</i>
Rufous turtle dove	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	Kashmir redbreasted flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa subrubra</i>
Indian ring dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Whitebrowed blue flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa supercilialis</i>
Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus Canorus</i>	Slaty blue flycatcher	<i>Phylloscopus magrirostris</i>
Small cuckoo	<i>Cuculus poliocephalus</i>	Yellowbrowed leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus inornatus</i>
House swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Largebilled leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus magrirostris</i>
Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	Plumbeous redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>
White breasted kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Whitecapped redstart	<i>Chaimarrornis leucocephala</i>
Kashmir roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	Blue whistling thrush	<i>Myiophonus caeruleus</i>
Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Tickell's thrush	<i>Turdus unicolor</i>
Scalybellied green woodpecker	<i>Picus squamatus</i>	Brown dipper	<i>Cinclus pallasii</i>
Blacknaped green woodpecker	<i>Picus canus</i>	Grey tit	<i>Parus major</i>
Himalayan pied woodpecker	<i>Picoides himalayensis</i>	Greenbacked tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>
Brownfronted pied woodpecker	<i>Picoides auriceps</i>	Grey wagtail	<i>Motacilla cinerea</i>
Rufousbacked shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Pied wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Grey or ashy drongo	<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	Cinnamon tree sparrow	<i>Passer rutilans</i>
Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Rock bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>
Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Greyheaded bunting	<i>Emberiza fucata</i>



Koels

Apropos the information given by Dr. Ishwar Prakash about the 'Koel Boom at Jodhpur' in the issue of the Newsletter Vol. 38, No. 6 (Nov/Dec 1998), I have to report a similar phenomenon in my grounds here in Bhuj. I have observed during the last two decades or more that the koel (*Edynamys scolopacea*) population in my compound has been on the increase. The extent of my land is about 7 acres. Of this area some part is open, while on approximately 3/4 of the land there are Mango, Tamarind and Neem trees which are large and the house crows (*Corvus splendens*) mostly prefer to build their nests on them. There are over half a dozen pairs of the crows and an equal number of pairs of koel. For at least the last five years I have not seen any young crow leave nests, whereas I watch 2 or 3 young fledged koels being fed by pairs of crows.

Koels and Partridges

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The crows start their breeding activities here in Kutch from about the end of May or the beginning of June every year. Naturally the koel's breeding cycle synchronizes with that of the former species. This is the time the chasing of the koels by the crows is an unending exercise, and in this game of hide and seek the koel snatches the opportunity of laying her eggs. The peak period of these activities is towards the middle of June and the chicks hatch out in July and thereafter. Some pairs of crows apparently raise second broods during the season, for I see koel fledglings being fed even up to the month of October.

Last year some crow nests were destroyed by being blown away by the force of the cyclone which hit parts of Kutch in June. So the birds built their nests again and about half a dozen young koels left the nests in September/October and I

saw them being fed by their foster parents till November. However it was strange to see two koels being fed till December and I last heard them begging for food even up to January 14 this year (1999). This raises the question whether these two young koels hatched out later than I thought, or whether they kept on begging for food till their foster parents were willing to continue feeding them?

Partridges

This is to supplement the information given by J.K. Tiwari in the Newsletter Vol. 38, No. 6 about the clutch of 11 eggs he came across in the nest of a grey partridge. He has mentioned the unpublished notes of K.R. Eates (who found 9 eggs in a clutch) as quoted by Dr. T.J. Roberts (The Birds of Pakistan, Vol. 1, O.U.P., 1991). I may mention here that in about 500 page MS (unpublished) written by Kenneth Eates on the Breeding Birds of Sind is lodged with the British Museum of Natural History (Appendix II, The Birds of Pakistan Vol. 1.)

E.C. Stuart Baker (The Nidification of Birds of the Indian Empire, Vol. IV, Taylor and Francis, London, 1935) says: "The number of eggs in a clutch varies from four to eight, occasionally nine; six or seven being the usual number." Thus the discovery of Tiwari is interesting.

The grey francolin is one of the birds which I have studied in some detail both in captivity as also in the wild. Though monogamous pair bonds are formed, this species also lives peacefully in covies of four to eight birds consisting of more than 2 or 3 individuals of both sexes. These covies do not break up or disperse even during the breeding season in which laying of eggs starts in February/March, but the peak period is reached in April/May. I have noted 5 to 8 eggs in the clutches I have come across over the years. The eggs in shape are pointed at the narrow end. Some eggs have a glossy texture where in the majority of cases the texture is rather dull and their colour ranges from light brownish, or *café au lait* as some ornithologists prefer to call it, to pale buff with no marking except occasionally some light coloured small spots here and there of concentrated calcium.

The pairs and covies (family parties) living in a given area move about and forage for food particularly in the mornings and evenings but do not mix with each other. They have territories which they defend and trespassers are driven out. This is preceded by much calling and challenging and often fighting ensues between mostly males. This activity is more evident during the breeding season. Partridges call throughout the year but are more vociferous as they come into breeding condition in January. The two types of calls commonly heard are the combined effort of both sexes, the female adding her sharp monosyllabic *tee...tee* to the longer call of the male.

While mentioning the calls of the grey partridge or francolin (as it is now called) I am reminded of an anecdote

which I feel I should narrate here. The Japanese mist net was newly acquired by the Bombay Natural History Society and it was used for the first time in Kutch near Bhuj for a project which included catching and ringing birds in the year 1959. As usual it was lead by the grand old patriarch of Indian ornithology, Dr. Salim Ali, and incidentally the Editor of the Birdwatchers Newsletter was also there in the party. As we were fixing the poles for putting on the nets in preparation for trapping the birds, a pair of partridges called from nearby. As they called again I mentioned to SA that what we heard was the combined call of the male and female. As they called once again I drew his attention to the sharp *tee* or *kee* uttered by the female of the pair. Whereupon the Old Man at once told me, 'write a note on this for the Journal.' That is how I was prompted to give a note on the different calls of this species (J.B.N.H.S. Vol. 56, No. 3). Until then the general impression was that it was only the male that uttered the call alone.

To continue with my account of the breeding cycle of the grey partridge, whether from a pair or a covey, when about to lay eggs, a female quietly goes about searching for a suitable nest site which is usually well concealed in a bush or a tussock of grass. She then scratches the ground with her feet and makes a shallow depression which at times is left bare but more often than not, is lined with grass and leaves. She does not actually go through the process of nest-building as such but the fallen leaves and the broken bits and pieces of grass stems as also the bent stems are pressed under the weight of the bird into the depression as she sits and turns about in the preparation of the nest. During this process every now and then a piece or stem of grass is picked up and thrown over the back with the bill. When about to lay an egg the female quietly and unobtrusively detaches herself from the other members of her group and slips into the nest and leaves it after the egg is laid. One egg is laid every day generally in the late afternoon between 3 and 4 p.m. She starts to incubate after the last egg of the clutch is laid. The incubation period is 18 days. While in the nest the sitting female keeps absolutely still and makes no move to leave even when approached close. This is an instinctive pattern of behaviour which normally ensures the safety of the sitting bird as well as her nest and eggs. While the female partridge incubates her eggs neither the male nor any other birds from the group (if she belongs to a covey) ever venture anywhere near the nest site.

The next stage in the breeding of partridge is the hatching of the eggs and the care of the chicks. On the eighteenth day the chicks start coming out of the eggs in the evening and the whole brood mostly hatches out during the night. The female leaves the nest calling the young out and they are gradually led away far from the nest site the next morning. At this time the male joins the family (in a covey the dominant male does so) and helps in the parental duties. In the covey the whole group adopt the new arrivals and are protected from danger such as attacks by predators. At the sight or approach of a

cat, birds of prey etc. sharp alarm calls are given by the parents or guardians and the chicks immediately disperse and freeze on the ground crouching low. They remain there till called away by the adults. Thus the young partridge remain with a pair or in a covey, but once they are fully grown and

mature the adults drive them away. Such ousted birds form their own associations or mix with others similarly ousted from other families. This is perhaps the scheme of mother nature to prevent inbreeding within the free-living grey francolins. Often two broods are raised in a breeding season.



Birds of Whitefield and Kodi Tank (Bangalore)

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On 28th June 1998, I landed in Bangalore, presumably the greenest of the present day mega-cities, in pursuit of a six month research-project with Hindustan Lever Limited (HLL) at their research center in Whitefield, a distant suburb of Bangalore. Being a Mumbaiite, I was definitely going to appreciate the weather of the garden city.

I was hoping to be accommodated in a quiet location away from the tumult of the city. I had enough of this racket at Mumbai. And, the company obliged by providing me with a dream guest-house adjacent to the research center in Whitefield and allowed me to continue my alliance with the feathered bipeds even after being displaced more than a 1000 km from home. Whitefield (c. 12°58' Lat. and 77°44' E Long.) situated about 26 km from the Bangalore city railway station is predominantly a residential area with a few industrial set-ups along the main road that eventually meets the Bangalore-Madras National highway (NH-4) via Kadugodi and Hosakote villages.

Like most areas in Bangalore, it is blessed with a large water body called the Kodi/Varthur tank about 1 km to the south. However, like most tanks it suffers from severe eutrophication due to millions of gallons of the city's sewage being dumped into it everyday. Nevertheless, it is a favoured haunt of numerous wetland birds both resident and migratory. Subsequently, a smaller tank was also discovered behind the research center which has its share of water-birds. Together, these water bodies form the life-support system for the avifauna in the Whitefield region.

Although, the area is visibly greener when compared with the main city, there is considerable evidence of degradation due to human interference. Unending number of farmlands mark the landscape. There are an equally high number of monoculture farms of eucalyptus and coconut. Some places have been cleared-off to make way for either rose and marigold cultivation or grape orchards for satisfying a thriving export business. The positives though from a bird point of view are massive trees of *Ficus benghalensis* and *F. religiosa* on either side of the road while Singapore cherry, *Tamarindus indica* and *Michelia champaca* further inland.

The two locations studied extensively during my stay were the area adjoining my residence and the Hindustan Lever Ltd.

campus. Out of the two, the HLL campus was frequented by a veritable who's who of the bird world due to abundant tree cover comprising both native and exotic species. In fact, it was heartening to know that special efforts were made to spare the existing trees during the construction of the new research center. The campus sports trees like *Millingtonia hortensis*, *Santalum album*, *Gliricidia sepium*, *Spathodea campanulata*, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, *Ficus benghalensis*, *F. religiosa*, *Tamarindus indica*, *Mangifera indica*, *Artocarpus heterophyllus*, *Michelia champaca*, *Eucalyptus*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Anacardium occidentale*, *Peltaphorum roxburghii*, *Delonix regia*, Singapore cherry, etc. The residential area supports more of Singapore cherry, *Tamarindus indica*, *Michelia champaca*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Bauhinia* sp in addition to a thick growth of *Lantana camara*. The small pond behind the HLL research center is lined with thickets of *Acacia* sp. from one side while an open semi-cultivated land from the other.

The surveyed area has been classified into various habitat types to ascertain the preference shown by a particular bird species. This in-turn, assists in evaluating its tolerance/intolerance to human intervention. Therefore, a bird seen in a certain habitat can always be spotted in another surrounding it but with a lesser probability. In light of the growing human population and consequently an even greater need for space, I sincerely believe that the future of all species will be decided by their adaptability to man-made environs. The tolerant ones will survive while the less hardy will perish only to be mummified within record-books like this one. Our subtle understanding of their preferences therefore will go a long way in postponing if not preventing their demise.

HABITAT (HAB)

K = Kodi tank and nearby fields

W = Whitefield village tank behind HLL research center and immediate shrub

S = Predominantly scrub with few trees and varying levels of human disturbances

C = Cultivated land

M = Mixed tree cover (evergreen, dry and moist deciduous, eucalyptus)

A = Man-made structures

H = Hindustan Lever Ltd. Research Center

ABUNDANCE SCALE (AS)

C = Common

NC = Not so common

UC = Uncommon

R = Rare

FEEDING GUIDE (FG)

G = Granivores

A = Aquatic vegetarian

F = Frugivores

P = Piscivores

C = Carnivores (animal/carrion)

O = Omnivores

N = Nectarivores

R = Feeding on rodents/small reptiles

I = Feeding on invertebrates



Some of the interesting sightings were that of the black-naped oriole (regularly seen in HLL campus. The bird doesn't appear in the check-list titled The Birds of Bangalore, published in 1994. However, I have seen a few individuals even in Bannerghatta N.P.), red avadavat, black-headed cuckoo shrike, grey francolin just behind HLL campus in the heart of a village, and thick-billed flowerpecker. The pale-billed flowerpecker and Asian koel were observed in the vicinity of Singapore cherry trees with startling regularity. They seem to relish both flower and fruit of this tree in particular. The complete list of birds sighted during my stay from July 1998 to January 1999 is as follows:-

No.	Species	Scientific Name	HAB	AS	FG
1	Grey francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	S,C	R	G
2	Shoveller	<i>Anas clypeata</i>	K	C	AI
3	White-naped woodpecker	<i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	M,H	UC	I
4	White-cheeked barbet	<i>Megalaima viridis</i>	M,H	C	F
5	Coppersmith barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	M,H	C	F
6	Eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	S,C,A,H	NC	I
7	Common kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	K,W	NC	P
8	White-throated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	K,W,S,C,M,H	C	P,I
9	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	S,C,H	C	I
10	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	M,H	C	F,I
11	Greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	M,H	NC	I,F
12	Rose-ringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	S,C,M,A,H	NC	F
13	Asian palm swift	<i>Cypsiurus balasiensis</i>	S,M	UC	I
14	Little swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	A,H	C	I
15	Barn owl	<i>Tyto alba</i>	S,A,H	R	R
16	Spotted owl	<i>Athene brama</i>	S,A,H	C	R,I
17	Rock pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>	S,A,H	NC	G
18	Spotted dove	<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	S,C,M,H	C	G
19	Green sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	W	UC	I
20	Common sandpiper	<i>Tringa hypoleucos</i>	W	UC	I
21	Red-wattled lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	W,C	C	I
22	River tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	K,W	R	I
23	Crested honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchos</i>	W	R	C
24	Black-shouldered kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	S,C	R	C
25	Black kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	K,W,S,C,A,H	C	O
26	Brahminy kite	<i>Haliastur indus</i>	K,W,H	C	O
27	Eurasian marsh harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	K	R	C
28	Shikra	<i>Accipiter badius</i>	S,M,H	UC	C
29	Little grebe	<i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	K	C	P
30	Little cormorant	<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>	K,W	NC	P
31	Little egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	K,W,C	NC	P
32	Intermediate egret	<i>Mesophoyx intermedia</i>	K,W	UC	P,I
33	Great egret	<i>Casmerodius albus</i>	K	UC	P,I
34	Cattle egret	<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	S,C,H	C	I
35	Indian pond heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	K,W,C	C	P,I
36	Purple heron	<i>Ardea purpurea</i>	W	R	P,I
37	Rufous treepie	<i>Dedrocitta vagabunda</i>	M,H	UC	O
38	House crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	S,C,M,A,H	C	O
39	Large-billed crow	<i>Corvus macrohynchos</i>	S,C,M,A,H	C	O
40	Eurasian golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	M,H	R	F

41	Black-naped oriole	<i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	M,H	UC	F
42	Black-headed cuckooshrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	M,H	R	F
43	Black drongo	<i>Dicrurus macorcerus</i>	S,C,M,H	NC	I
44	Asian paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	M,H	UC	I
45	Common iora	<i>Agithina tiphia</i>	M,H	NC	I
46	Asian brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa daurica</i>	M,H	R	I
47	Oriental magpie robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	S,M,H	NC	I
48	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	S,C,M	UC	I
49	Common stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	S,C	R	I
50	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	S,C	C	I
51	Brahminy myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	S,M,H	NC	F
52	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	S,C,M,H	C	F,I
53	Jungle myna	<i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	S,C,M,H	C	F,I
54	Great tit	<i>Parus major</i>	M,H	UC	I
55	Barn swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	K,W,S,C,H	C	I
56	Wire-tailed swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	K	UC	I
57	Red-rumped swallow	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>	K,W,S,C,H	C	I
58	Red-vented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	S,M,H	C	F
59	Streaked fantail warbler	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	K	C	I
60	Grey-breasted prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>	K,S,C	NC	I
61	Jungle prinia	<i>Prinia sylvatica</i>	K,S,C	UC	I
62	Ashy prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	K,S,C,H	C	I
63	Plain prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	K,C	UC	I
64	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	W	UC	I
65	Common tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	W,S,C,M,A,H	C	I
66	Greenish warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides</i>	S,M,H	UC	I
67	Yellow-billed babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	S,M,H	C	I,F
68	Singing bushlark	<i>Mirafra cantillans</i>	S,C	UC	I
69	Pale-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum erythrohynchos</i>	M,H	C	N,F
70	Thick-billed flowerpecker	<i>Dicaeum agile</i>	M	R	N,F
71	Purple-rumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	S,M,H	C	N
72	Purple sunbird	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>	S,M,H	UC	N
73	House sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	S,A,H	C	G,I
74	White-browed wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	K,W,S,C,A,H	C	I
75	Baya weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	K,C,S	UC	G,I
76	Red avadavat	<i>Amandava amandava</i>	S,C	UC	G
77	Indian silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	S,C	UC	G
78	Scaly-breasted munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	S,C,A,H	C	G
79	Black-headed munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	C	R	G



Latest Sightings of Green Munia [*Estrilda formosa*]

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The green munia (*Estrilda formosa*) is distributed in "a broad belt of central India between a line from Sirohi (Rajasthan) to Hazaribagh (Bihar) in the north, and Khandesh (Maharashtra) to Visakhapatnam ghats (Andhra). Local and patchy" (Ali, 1996). But its local and patchy distribution is also largely unknown. In the last two decades, there have been only a few sightings.

It was recorded in Delhi (Gaston and Mackrell, 1980). In Kanha National Park, a single specimen was seen by Newton *et al.*, (1986) while a flock was noted by Kanoje (1996). It was also seen in southern Rajasthan (Sharma and Raza, 1994), in Chhattarpur district in Madhya Pradesh (Bhargava, 1996) and in Thar Desert (Rahmani, 1997).

The green munia has not been recorded recently in some of its known areas of distribution. They are Karera Bustard Sanctuary (Rahmani, 1991), Kota district (Vyas, 1992), Bandhavgarh National park (Tyabji, 1994) and Morena district (Saxena, 1998). I have also not seen it in Gwalior district.

In north central Madhya Pradesh, I have seen two flocks of 12 and 7 green munias in August 1993 and September 1997 respectively, in an area situated east of Betwa river near the tourist centre of Orchha in Tikamgarh district in Madhya Pradesh. This area comprises patches of stony scrubland, agriculture farms and dry deciduous forest. But in Jan 1999 I could not locate a single specimen in the same region. Bhargava (1996) sighted it in the nearby Chhattarpur district but did not disclose the name of the village for some "obvious reason".

I have visited zoos and seen some private cage bird collections in Madhya Pradesh in 1998. They exhibit all species of munia but not a single specimen of green munia although it was a popular cage bird some 5 years ago. If this elusive bird is difficult to locate and trap, it is good for its survival. Or, does it indicate that this olive green bird is fast disappearing from its past distribution range? It is reported that it prefers lantana scrub country in general, and sugarcane fields in its breeding season.

I appeal to the birdwatchers of central India to look for this bird to gather more information not only on its distribution, but also on its nesting behaviour, which in Ali's (1996) words, is "curiously enough very little known".

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Sightings of Green Munia *Estrilda formosa* in Gujarat and Rajasthan

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North Gujarat Survey

The forest in north Gujarat is dominated by dry deciduous species. A 1625 sq km reserve forest area exists in the Banaskantha district. The major protected areas lie in Baludhara Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Balaram reserved forest and Ambaji range reserve forest. *Acacia leucophloea*, *Acacia nilotica*, *Butea monosperma*, *Anogeisus*, *Moringa*, *Terminalia*, *Carissa* etc. are the dominating tree species found in north Gujarat.

The river Jethi flows through Balaram forest and it supports a healthy dry deciduous and tropical thorn forest habitat with some rolling grasslands on the slopes of aravali hills. This appears to be the ideal habitat for the green munias.

We surveyed the Taranga hills on 21 May 1996.

A total of nine green munia *Estrilda formosa* (red-data species) was seen at Taranga hills. They were seen in a nullah near a forest clearing. Spotted munias were also seen in the same area.

Rajasthan Survey

Rajasthan is the second largest state of India. The state covers 10.74% of the total area of India.

Sirohi district in some parts is barren and desolate, in others extensively cultivated with almost all sorts of crops. The Aravali range dissect the district. There are rolling grasslands at several places in the Aravalis where green munias were seen by the authors. Recently spread exotic weeds like *Prosopis juliflora*, *Casia tora*, and *Lantana camara* have caused severe damage to the natural ecosystems of the Aravali range and to the plains in Sirohi district.

Mount Abu

The Abu hills were scanned for its birdlife in the first week of October 1996. Six green munias were seen in an agricultural field near Salgaon area on the way to Dr. Salim Ali Watch-tower. Avadavat or the red munias were also seen with other species of Munias like spotted munias and the whitethroated munias. Five green munias were seen near Adhar Devi temple forest. Three green munias were seen near the teachers training centre and Kanyakumari temple at Mt. Abu.

The Salim Ali watch-tower area is rich in wildlife. About 2 km away from Dilwara area the watch-tower stands in the heart of a thick forest near a river.

The plains of Sirohi district have agricultural fields, mixed plantations, and few wilderness areas. The plains were surveyed from the Jawaiband area to Abu Road and Revdar till the limit of Jalore district. The birdlife was not drastically different from the neighbouring district like Pali and Jalore as far as the birds of the plains are concerned. The richest forest areas in the Aravali range is still concentrated in the Abu-Sirohi tract. This area should be protected and the deforestation should be checked. Removal of weeds like *Lantana camara* should be carried out on large scale.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to the Oriental Bird Club UK and the Leica Camera Company for providing the fund to conduct the study of pied tit *Parus muchalis*. The present observations were taken during the pied tit survey of Gujarat and Rajasthan. I am very thankful to the Bombay Natural History Society and the US Fish and Wildlife Service for providing me an opportunity to work in the Bird Migration and Grassland Study projects in Kutch district. I am thankful to Mr & Mrs Inskipp for their kind help and encouragement.



Birds at Sembium, Simpson Estate, Madras

Vinoj Matthew Philip and V. Gurusami, Environmental Resources Research Centre, P.B. 1230, Peroorkada, Trivandrum 695 005, Kerala, Naturalist & Bird Consultant, Simpson Estate, Huzur Gardens, Sembium, Madras 600 011

All our visits to this unique wetland have been very rewarding. For nature lovers, this is a rare place to get acquainted with the intricate life styles of wetland birds.

There are over 10,000 native, exotic and ornamental trees albizia, within the Estate, including tamarind, neem, subabul, prosopis, casuarina, eucalyptus, peltophorum, rain tree, erythrina, delonix, figs, kapok, mango, coconut, banyan, to name a few. These provide birds with nest sites and essential nesting material within the Estate. The cacophony of avian calls at dawn and dusk, reaches a crescendo during the breeding seasons coinciding with the north-east (Oct-Jan) and south-west (June-Sept) monsoons. Virtually, a place for recordists of bird calls. This unique ecosystem is the breeding ground for thousands of waterfowl. Though their droppings platter tractors and farm equipment and the vehicles of the workers of the Industrial Estate, they seldom harm the birds,

as they are aware of their role in the enrichment of the soil through their nitrogen rich guano.

The star attraction of the Estate as far as birdlife is concerned, is the lily pond. It is a purely rainfed pond and its depth ranges from 9 ft at the centre to 13 ft on its two flanks. It holds as much as 4 ft of water till April, and later dries up by the end of May. The lily pond is an integral part of the Estate ecosystem. It is the feeding habitat of juvenile wetland birds like rails (moorhen, white-breasted water-hen and kora or water cock), bitterns, pond herons, pheasant-tailed jacanas, purple heron, dabchicks and others. The adult wetland birds which breed in the Estate have feeding grounds 30-40 kms away from the state. The breeding wetland birds constantly use the lily pond to seek relief from the heat by cooling the brood patches existing in herons and egrets and the vascularised webbing in cormorants.

The aquatic vegetation comprises a host of algae, free-floating and anchored hydrophytes including the lily (predominant from October to April) and Lotus (late April to late September). Aquatic fauna ranges from plankton, native fishes, frogs, tadpoles, insects and their larvae, keelback water snakes and fresh water terrapins. About 20 species of butterflies and the rare lunar moth have been recorded here. Woodland birds include the blackcapped kingfisher and the red winged crested cuckoo. Our records till April 1997, reveal a healthy total of 108 species. The annual bird count in August 1996, revealed that nearly 5,500 birds colonised the heronry and 1,100 pairs were found breeding successfully. This was the most satisfactory south-west monsoon synchronized breeding of the waterfowl, ever recorded in the Estate, by V.G.

The unseasonal rainfall in June 1996, in Madras (76 cms) was exceptionally high and we presume this to have triggered gonadal development in the wetland birds, which commenced breeding in large numbers earlier than usual.

Acknowledgements

We wish to express our sincere thanks to Mr A Krishnamurthy, Vice-Chairman, Messrs Amalgamations Ltd, The Management and staff of Simpson & Co., for their concern for the birds and their co-operation extended to us at all times. We strongly recommend that, the Estate wetland should be recognised as a potential site for wintering waterfowl, under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

Checklist of the Birds of Simpson's Estate, Sembium

Sl.No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
Family : PHASIADAE : Partridges, Quails, Pheasants			
001	Grey partridge/grey francolin	<i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	R
Family : DENDROCYGNIDAE : Whistling Ducks			
002	Lesser whistling teal/tree duck	<i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	WV
Family : ANATIDAE : Ducks			
003	Cotton teal/cotton pygmy goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	O
004	Garganey/blue-winged teal	<i>Anas querquedula</i>	WV
Family : PICIDAE : Woodpeckers			
005	Lesser goldenbacked wood pecker/ blackrumped flame back	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	C
Family : MEGALAIMIDAE : Asian Barbets			
006	Crimsonbreasted barbet/ coppersmith barbet	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>	C
Family : UPUPIDAE : Hoopoes			
007	Hoopoe/eurasian hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	C
Family : CORACIIDAE : Rollers			
008	Indian roller/blue jay	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	O
Family : ALCEDINIDAE : Blue Kingfishers			
009	Common/white-eared blue kingfisher	<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	C
Family : DACELONIDAE : Halcyon Kingfishers			
010	Whitebreasted/whitethroated kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	C
011	Blackcapped kingfisher	<i>H. pileata</i>	WV
Family : CERYLIDAE : Kingfishers			
012	Lesser pied kingfisher	<i>Ceryle rudis</i>	C
Family : MEROPIDAE : Bee-eaters			
013	Green bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	C
014	Bluetailed bee-eater	<i>M. philippinus</i>	O
Family : CUCULIDAE : Cuckoos			
015	Pied crested cuckoo/pied cuckoo	<i>Oxolophus jacobinus</i>	O
016	Redwinged crested/chestnutwinged cuckoo	<i>Clamator coromandus</i>	R
017	Common hawk-cuckoo/brain fever bird	<i>Cuculus varius</i>	O
018	Indian cuckoo	<i>C. micropterus</i>	WV
019	Rufusbellied plaintive cuckoo	<i>Cacomantis merulinus</i>	WV
020	Asian koel	<i>Eudynamys scolopacea</i>	C
Family : CENTROPOCIDAE : Coucals			
021	Crow-pheasant/greater coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	O
Family : PSITTACIDAE : Parrots			
022	Roseringed parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	C



Family : APODIDAE : Swifts

023 Asian palm swift

024 House/little swift

Family : TYTONIDAE : Barn Owls

025 Barn/screech owl

Family : STRIGIDAE : Owls

026 Collared/Indian scope owl

027 Eagle-owl/great horned owl

028 Spotted owl

Family : CAPRIMULGIDAE : Nightjars

029 Common Indian nightjar

Family : COLUMBIDAE : Pigeons, Doves

030 Spotted dove

Family : RALLIDAE : Rails

031 Whitebreasted waterhen

032 Kora/water cock

033 Indian/common moorhen

Family : SCOLOPACIDAE : Sandpipers

034 Green sandpiper

035 Common sandpiper

Family : JACANIDAE : Jacanas

036 Pheasant-tailed jacana

Family : CHARADRIIDAE : Plovers

037 Blackwinged stilt

038 Redwattled lapwing

Family : LARIDAE : Gulls, Terns

039 Whiskered tern

Family : ACCIPITRIDAE : Hawks, Eagles

040 Blackwinged kite

041 Pariah/black kite

042 Brahminy kite

043 Egyptian/scavenger vulture

044 Marsh harrier

045 Shikra

046 Booted hawk-eagle

Family : FALCONIDAE : Falcons

047 Kestrel

Family : PODICIPEDIDAE : Grebes

048 Little grebe/dabchick

Family : ANHINGIDAE : Darters

049 Oriental darter/snake bird

Family : PHALACROCORACIDAE : Cormorants

050 Little cormorant

051 Indian shag

Family : ARDEIDAE : Herons

052 Little egret

053 Indian reef heron

054 Grey heron

055 Purple heron

056 Large egret

057 Intermediate egret

058 Cattle egret

059 Pond heron/paddy bird

060 Night heron

*Cypsiurus balasiensis*

C

Apus affinis

O

Tyto alba

O

Otus bakkamoena

R

Bubo bubo

R

Athene brama

C

Caprimulgus asiaticus

R

Streptopelia chinensis

C

Amauornis phoenicurus

C

Gallicrex cinerea

R

Gallinula chloropus

C

Tringa ochropus

WV

T. hypoleucos

WV

Hydrophasianus chirurgus

O

Himantopus himantopus

O

Vanellus indicus

O

Chlidonias hybridus

O

Elanus caeruleus

O

Milvus migrans

C

Haliastur indus

O

Neophron percnopterus

R

Circus aeruginosus

WV

Accipiter badius

C

Hieraaetus pennatus

WV

Falco tinnunculus

WV

Tachybaptus ruficollis

O

Anhinga melanogaster

O

Phalacrocorax niger

C

P. fuscicollis

C

Egretta garzetta

C

E. gularis

R

Ardea cinerea

O

A. purpurea

O

Casmerodius albus

C

Mesophoyx intermedia

C

Bubulcus ibis

C

Ardeola grayii

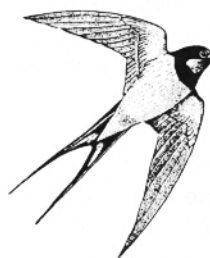
C

Nycticorax nycticorax

C



061	Malay/tiger bittern	<i>Gorsachius melanolophus</i>	R
062	Yellow bittern	<i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	O
063	Chestnut bittern	<i>I. cinnamomeus</i>	O
064	Black bittern	<i>I. flavicollis</i>	O
Family : THRESKIORNITHIDAE : Ibises, Spoonbills			
065	White ibis	<i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	O
Family : CICONIIDAE : Storks			
066	Openbill stork	<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	O
067	White stork	<i>Ciconia boyciana</i>	WV
Family : PITTIDAE : Pittas			
068	Indian pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>	WV
Family : LANIIDAE : Shrikes			
069	Brown shrike	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>	WV
070	Baybacked shrike	<i>L. vittatus</i>	O
071	Grey backed/Tibetan shrike	<i>L. tephronotus</i>	R
Family : CORVIDAE : Crows, Orioles, Drongos, Ioras			
072	Indian tree pie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	C
073	Indian house crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	C
074	Jungle/largebilled crow	<i>C. macrorhynchos</i>	C
075	Ashy swallow-shrike	<i>Artamus fuscus</i>	C
076	Golden oriole	<i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	C
077	Blackheaded cuckoo-shrike	<i>Coracina melanoptera</i>	O
078	Black drongo/king crow	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	C
079	Grey/ashy drongo	<i>D. leucophaeus</i>	WV
080	Paradise flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>	WV
Family : MUSCICAPIDAE : Thrushes, Flycatchers, Chats			
081	Orangeheaded ground thrush	<i>Zoothera citrina</i>	WV
082	Whitethroated ground thrush	<i>Z. cyanotus</i>	WV
083	Brown flycatcher	<i>Muscicapra daurica</i>	WV
084	Bluethroated flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubeculoides</i>	WV
085	Magpie-robin/dhyal thrush	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	C
086	Indian robin	<i>Saxicoloides fulicata</i>	O
087	Pied bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	R
Family : STURNIDAE : Starlings, Mynas			
088	Blackheaded/brahmyn myna	<i>Sturnus pagodarum</i>	O
089	Common myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	C
Family : HIRUNDINIDAE : Swallows, Martins			
090	Common swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	WV
091	Striated/redrumped swallow	<i>H. daurica</i>	WV
Family : PYCNONOTIDAE : Bulbuls			
092	Redvented bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	C
093	Whitebrowed bulbul	<i>P. luteolus</i>	O
Family : SYLVIIDAE : Warblers, Babblers			
094	Blyth's reed warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	WV
095	Tailor bird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	C
096	Greenish leaf warbler	<i>Phylloscopus trochiloides viridanus</i>	WV
097	Whiteheaded babbler	<i>Turdoides affinis</i>	C
Family : NECTARINIIDAE : Flowerpeckers, Sunbirds			
098	Purplerumped sunbird	<i>Nectarinia zeylonica</i>	C
099	Purple sunbird	<i>N. asiatica</i>	R
100	Loten's sunbird	<i>N. lotenia</i>	O
Family : PASSERIDAE : Sparrows, Wagtails, Pipits, Accentors, Weavers			
101	Forest wagtail	<i>Dendronathus indicus</i>	WV
102	Pied/white wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	WV



103	Large pied wagtail	<i>M. maderaspatensis</i>	C
104	Yellowheaded wagtail	<i>M. citreola</i>	WV
105	Grey wagtail	<i>M. cinerea</i>	WV
106	Whitethroated munia/common silverbill	<i>Lonchura malabarica</i>	O
107	Spotted munia/nutmeg mannikin	<i>L. punctulata</i>	C
108	Blackheaded munia	<i>L. malacca</i>	O

Abbreviations used : C — Common; O — Occasional; R — Rare; WV — Winter Visitor

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ABSTRACTS

INTERACTION BETWEEN ACANTHUS AND SUNBIRDS AT CORINGA, ANDHRA PRADESH. DR ALURI JACOB SOLOMON RAJU, Assistant Professor, Department of Environmental Sciences, Andhra University, Visakhapatnam 530 003, Andhra Pradesh

Acanthus ilicifolius L. commonly called 'the spiny or hollyleaf mangrove, is the best known plant in a closely related group of ground flora mangroves.

Sunbirds, mainly, *Nectarinia asiatica* and *N. zeylonica* and also large carpenter bees of the genus *Xylocopa* forage for nectar of *Acanthus* flowers. The birds land on the flowering branch and insert their bill through the staminal column surrounding the style while the bees use the corolla lower lip for landing and then probe the flowers like sunbirds do. The birds exhibit territoriality by chasing away the bees in order to exploit the floral resource profitably.

Acanthus has large populations in the area and serves as a potential nectar source for the sunbirds for a period of 3-4 months (May-August). The interaction between *Acanthus* flowers and the sunbirds benefits both partners, the former achieves pollination and the latter obtains food. Further, the relationship ensures the occurrence of both partners in the mangrove habitats.



ANTING BY BLACK KITE (*MILVUS MIGRANS GOVINDA*). ARUNAYAN SHARMA, N.S. Road (in front of T.D.P.), Malda 732 101, West Bengal

On 20th September, 1997 at around 1020 hrs while returning from my birding trip from Sagardighi, an artificial fish pond, 7 km from Malda town, I saw a black kite (*Milvus*

migrans) standing by the road side. I observed that the bird was constantly pecking its feathers and jerking.

Through a 10 x 50 binocular at a distance of 30 m, I saw red ants crawling on the kite's body. Later searching for references I found that anting by the black kite has not been recorded before.

Many birds use formic acid present in the ants to get rid of ectoparasites (Asad Rahmani, Personal Communication).

There are two basic types of anting. Active anting — in which the bird picks up ants and applies them to its feathers and Passive anting — when the bird allows ants to run over its body. In this case it was passive anting.

Why do black kites indulge in Anting? It is known that most raptors use a nest year after year. So there is a possibility that the nest of the black kite was affected by parasites.

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CORRESPONDENCE

MALLARDS IN SOUTHERN WEST BENGAL. KAUSHIK DEUTI, Zoological Survey of India, Prani Vigyan Bhavan, M-Block, New Alipore, Calcutta 700 053

The mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) is a marsh duck that breeds mainly in the Palaerctic region. Very small numbers breed in Nepal and in some of Kashmir's lakes. It is a winter visitor to Pakistan, North-West, North and Central India but rare in Eastern North-Eastern India, in the Deccan and further south. Although the species has been reported from north West Bengal, there was no authentic record from southern West Bengal. While conducting the Mid-winter Waterfowl Census at Chittaranjan Lakes, Burdwan district, on January 23, 1999 three mallards were spotted. So this is the first record of this species from southern West Bengal.



NEWLY DISCOVERED LARGE HERONRY OF NIGHT HERONS IN PUNE. DR SATISH A PANDE, C/9 Bhosle Park, Sahakarnagar-2, Pune 411 009, India

On February 7, 1999 I chanced to discover the largest ever heronry of night herons (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) in the very heart of Pune city in Maharashtra state. This happens to be the second heronry of the night herons in Pune, the first one being in Kamla Nehru Park.

Active nesting of the night herons was seen on twenty trees which include, *Holoptelea integrifolia* [6], *Ficus religiosa* [4], *Mangifera indica* [6], *Syzygium cumini* [1], *Ficus glomerata* [2], *Delonix regia* [1]. An average number of twenty five nests were seen on each tree, and large trees like *Ficus religiosa* have more than thirty five nests. Four hundred and fifty nests could be physically counted and there could be more active nests. The average height of the nests from the ground is 45 feet, the tallest being at about 60 feet.

This year, the activity in the heronry started in the last week of October, 1998. Presently in this heronry, there are immature birds capable of flight, newly born and two to four weeks old chicks and upto five eggs per nest which are being incubated. Some nests offer an excellent inside view from an adjacent terrace of a five storied building. Observations regarding the incubation, hatching etc. are being recorded. All trees are located in a diameter of a quarter kilometer. Most trees were planted more than fifty years back. There are old and newly constructed and half completed housing complexes around the heronry. The busy Pune to Mumbai railway track is adjacent to the heronry. One *Ficus religiosa* tree is in fact very close to the busy Shivajinagar railway station and rest of the trees are in the area called Thube Park in

Shivajinagar suburb. The Mula river and the Mutha river are half km and one km away from this heronry.

This heronry has been active for the last three years and surprisingly has escaped the notice of the birdwatchers in Pune. The feeding activity is at its peak at dawn and dusk, continues throughout the night and sporadically is seen in the day time. Nest repair is continually carried out and the tree which is favored for this purpose is the Australian acacia, the leaves of which are seen in the beaks of the flying herons. No other bird species is nesting in this heronry. A much smaller heronry in Kamla Nehru Park this year was seen to have little cormorants nesting with the night herons.

The ground below the nest bearing trees is littered with fallen leaves, bird droppings, broken eggs and shells and dead chicks. One dead adult night heron was also seen in this area. The fallen fish were identified as *Tilapia* and *Punctius*, the former being abundant even in polluted water as it is a surface breathing carnivorous fish.

Common crow, jungle crow, pariah kite, sparrow hawk and coucal were sighted commonly in the heronry. Cats are seen to scavenge upon the fallen fish. This year for the first time in three years Hanuman langurs have started visiting the heronry. The langurs are seen to eat the eggs from the heron's nests. I have seen this happen a couple of times. Two adult birds which were actively guarding the nests were slapped by the langurs and suffered a fall. Radiological investigations of the injured night herons revealed broken radius and ulna, wing bones in one bird and fractured ulna in the other bird. Both the birds are under treatment.

One congenitally blind chick was also rescued from the ground and it was probably pushed out by the siblings. It was about two weeks old, was grossly underfed probably by intentional neglect. It died the next day. Another two to three weeks old sib was rescued from the ground and it is currently thriving well on hand fed dry fish diet. One adult injured night heron was successfully returned to nature and freedom in the Pashan Lake Bird Sanctuary.



THE MASSACRE OF MIGRANTS. AAMIR ALI, 14, Chemin de la Tourelle, 1209, Geneva, Switzerland

Those who massacre migrant birds, and States that allow this to happen were severely condemned by the 'International Court of Justice for Animal Rights'.

Franz Weber the ebullient Swiss conservationist who organizes the 'United Nations for Animals', held a session of the 'International Court of Justice for Animal Rights', on 15 February 1999 to pass judgement on crimes against migrants.

The Court noted that the flight of migrants southwards across Europe was a deadly contest against millions of hunters and against snares, nets and limed twigs. In Belgium, where snaring was forbidden some years ago, tens of thousands of migrants are captured every year for the pet trade. In France, shooting is widespread, specially on the passes across the Pyrenees. In Spain, hunters chase the birds all the way across the country.

Those migrants who fly down Italy face guns, limed traps and nets all the way to Sicily, Malta and Tunisia. In Greece, protective legislation is easily overlooked.

The Court was held with the cooperation of some 50 conservation organizations. Six European countries plus Lebanon were represented at the session and bore witness to the massacres and the methods used. The 'judgement' demanded the 'extermination' of irresponsible hunters and condemned Belgium, France, Italy, Spain, Greece and Malta for allowing this. Only Lebanon found favour with the Court for extending its ban on all hunting for another three years. The Court's findings will be communicated to the UN, the European Union and the Council of Europe.

Conservationists must consider whether 'overkill' by the use of terms such as *genocide*, *tens of millions of birds massacred*, *hordes of criminal hunters*, helps or hinders the cause.

[Based on a report published in the *Tribune de Geneve*, 16 February 1999]



STATUS OF THE PIED TIT *PARUS NUCHALIS* IN SOUTH INDIA. J.K. TIWARI, *Nature Conservation Centre, Sanghipuram, Moti-Ber, Abdasa, Kutch, Gujarat 370 655, India*

I am working on the status and distribution of the pied tit (white-winged black tit). I have published two research papers on this subject in *Bird Conservation International* (1992) and *Forktail* (1996). My work on the status of the pied tit in seven districts of Rajasthan and three districts of Gujarat is in press in *JBNHS*. Recently I received a grant from the Danish Ornithological Society (DAFIF) to study the status and distribution of the pied tit in Biligirirangan Hills, Mysore and nearby areas of S. India. May I request you to kindly inform me about your sight records of the pied tit. I shall be conducting a survey of the above areas in the S. India in May 1999.

Your help in the survey will be acknowledged. Kindly send information regarding the pied tit. The date of sighting, place of sighting, number of pied tits sighted, forest type, dominating tree species, presence of other tit species in the same forest e.g. presence/absence of grey tit. It was believed by Salim Ali that *Parus nuchalis* and *Parus major* are mutually exclusive. But I have seen both species in the same forest at some places in Gujarat and Rajasthan.



RECORDS OF SIGNIFICANCE FROM PULICAT, ANDHRA PRADESH AND PUNJAB. HARKIRAT S. SANGHA, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302 021, India

October 25, 1998. At about 8 O'clock in the evening it began to rain. I almost thought I was in for a disaster. If the rain continued there won't be any birdwatching and bird ringing. I had travelled more than 2000 kms to attend the BNHS bird ringing camp and I wanted fair weather during my one week stay in Pulicat. Fortunately, in the morning it stopped raining and we went birdwatching under a promising clear sky. We, the members of the BNHS, were at Pulicat to attend the bird ringing training camp organised by the BNHS under the supervision of Dr S Balachandran. During my stay at Pulicat from October 26, 1998 to November 1, 1998 (till afternoon) 337 birds were mistnetted. The dominating species was little stint (153 birds) although during birdwatching not too many were seen. I recorded 82 species at Pulicat. Many more birds could have been added if more time was spent in the forest area of Sriharikota island. The following accounts are limited to those species where our camp records update existing information.

Black tern *Chlidonias niger*

There are only a handful of records of this species. One bird was mistnetted and ringed by the participants of the camp. According to Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp (1998) it is a passage migrant, possibly overlooked because of confusion with other marsh terns. A few individuals were ringed in 1988 by BNHS at Pt. Calimere in Tamil Nadu (Rao *et al.*, 1996). One bird was ringed at Pulicat on 12.10.1990. In 1993 one bird was mistnetted and ringed at Pt. Calimere (Sangha, 1994).

Saunders' tern *Sterna saundersi*

One bird was mistnetted and ringed by the participants on 01.11.1998. Although not treated as a separate species by some authors it thrilled us all and was photographed by almost all members. It was carefully observed and measured before being released. Its outer primaries were more extensively black; rump grey, concolourous with mantle. The legs were almost brown.

Non-breeding specimens have been recorded/collected from Gujarat, Bombay, Sri Lanka, Lakshdweep and Maldives (Ali and Ripley, 1987). It has been also collected from Madras which is south of Pulicat lagoon. Apparently this is the first record of the species from Andhra Pradesh and the most northern east coast record.

Measurements

Wings	Bill	Tarsus	Tail
166 mm	30 mm	15.5 mm	49 mm

Singing bushlark *Mirafra cantillans*

It is a curious bird. I have seen this bird singing/displaying in May at Harike (Punjab) and at Ranthambhor (Rajasthan). I have seen this bird displaying in the month of June. At Ravli

Todgarh (Rajasthan) it was seen displaying in early August. They do not call after June at Harike.

Two birds were observed displaying near Venadu (Pulicat) on 28.10.1998. The area was almost barren with short grass and scattered bushes. The song of the birds was very prolonged. One individual was recorded hovering in the air for more than fifteen minutes. On 29.10.1998 at Tada (Pulicat) two more birds were seen singing. The ground cover was better at this site.

According to Ali and Ripley (1987) breeding season of the species is March to September. Grimmett, Inskipp and Inskipp (1998) have also given March to September as the breeding season (presumably based on Ali and Ripley). It seems the singing/display of the lark in India coincides with the monsoon for the bird is not seen singing after September in the North. Based on the observations at Pulicat it can be assumed that breeding season of singing bushlark extends upto November in South India as the retreating monsoon is active on the Coromandel Coast in October-November.

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BREEDING RECORD OF ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE *GLAREOLA MALDIVARUM* IN PUNJAB. HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA, B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302 021, India

Previously treated as a race of the common pratincole *Glareola pratincole* oriental pratincole's Indian population are mainly resident, but are breeding visitors to some areas and apparently nomadic in others (Hayman *et al.*, 1986). The oriental pratincole is described by Ali and Ripley (1981) as 'variously resident, summer visitor, nomadic and/or locally migratory'. Its breeding records in Indian sub-continent are from Sind (Pakistan), Madhya Pradesh, near Delhi, near Calcutta, Assam, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. A recent breeding record is from Kerala (JBNHS, 90(1)).

On 10.05.1998 Per Undeland and I found a breeding colony of about 10 pairs of oriental pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* at Rababsar, Punjab. The summer drying out of the lake provided ideal breeding conditions to the birds. Their breeding colony on a sun-baked islet was in association with blackwinged stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, small pratincole *Glareola lactea*, and little tern *Sterna albifrons*. Since the islet on which the birds were seen incubating was inaccessible more details could not be recorded.

This is the first record of *Glareola maldivarum* breeding in Punjab.

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HUNTING OF BUSTARDS BY ARAB FALCONERS : THE PROBLEM AND PROPOSED SOLUTIONS. MICHEL TERRASSE

Introduction

The hunting of several species of bustards in the desert areas of Africa and Asia by falconers from the Gulf States causes serious concern. Apart from the houbara bustard, which is hunted through most of its range (apart from the Canary Islands and a few other countries), falconers hunt all the bustard species in the African Sahelian countries, where some rare gazelles species are also hunted. The practice of importing large falcons (particularly saker falcon) from Asia to the Gulf States is raising concern about populations of these species in their breeding countries too. Political change in the former Soviet Union and neighbouring countries has opened up places such as Mongolia and Kazakhstan to the poorly checked export of such large falcons.

To resolve these problems requires organisations at an international level, such as Bird-Life International, to review the status of the species concerned and to raise awareness and put pressure on the countries where illegal hunting is taking place to comply with national legislation and their international obligations under treaties such as the CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity.

Currently the houbara is not listed as globally threatened by Bird-Life International in Birds to Watch 2 because of its

very wide distribution, and still relatively large populations in parts of its range. Therefore it is not in the current IUCN Red List. However, recent studies of the behaviour and genetics of the three sub-species of houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata undulata*, *C.u. fuertaventurae* and *C.u. macqueenii*) have suggested that the species could be divided into two separate species, one in Asia and another in Africa. This could change the conservation status of the North African houbara where there is evidence of large scale declines and no very large numbers.

The problem of falconry and the hunting of houbara bustards is not recent. In 1983, a meeting of the ICBP bustard Group in Peshawar, Pakistan, drew attention to the taking of raptors from the wild for falconry (principally saker falcon *Falco cherrug*) and also hunting of species such as houbara bustard, which is hunted throughout most of its distribution range. This activity, however, is on the increase and requires Bird-Life to seek data and information on the status of houbara bustard and possibly other bustard species. Traditionally hunting has taken place in Pakistan, North Africa, and the Middle East but hunting is occurring in new areas also, sometimes even in protected areas. This now involves Sahelian countries such as Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Chad, Sudan and northern Tanzania. All bustard species of these regions are being hunted including *Ardeotis arabs*, *Neotis denhami*, *Eupodotis melanogaster* and *Eupodotis senegalensis*.

The recent opening up of the former Soviet Union has enabled hunting to take place in new areas in central Asia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia in particular, where saker falcons are also easily obtainable.

Examples of Recent Problems

Pakistan

In 1993, 30 teams (with permits) of several tens of falcons, hunted the sedentary population of houbara bustard and the wintering population from central Asia. The wintering population in Pakistan was estimated at 7,500 in 1993 compared with 22,000 in 1983 when a hunting ban was brought in. Despite the efforts of local conservationists, hunting pressures from falconers from Abu Dhabi, Qatar and Saudi Arabia (annual offtake rates of 3,000- 7,000) are giving cause for concern.

Discussion

The situation is serious because of the threat to nearly all the bustard species within the desert and Sahelian areas of the old World (not withstanding the rare ungulates) and because of the uncontrolled removal of large falcons from their breeding ranges.

Saker falcons

An important consequence of bustard hunting is the capture of raptors, particularly saker falcons, for use in falconry. Traditionally this is a favourite species with falconers, other large falcons such as peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and

grey falcon *Falco rusticolus* are used too. They are captured during autumn migration in countries such as Pakistan and in the Middle East. It is estimated that a minimum of 3,000 saker falcons are held in captivity in the Gulf States and 1,500-2,000 are replaced each year. Illegal capture is now occurring in central Asia also.

Captive breeding programmes for houbara bustard

Following in the footsteps of Saudi Arabia, Morocco established a captive breeding centre and Tunisia will probably do so soon. These centres provide a certain amount of useful knowledge about the species but the releases into the wild are ineffective for the restocking of the wild population. In Europe attempts to repopulate areas with game bird species have failed completely.

Political influence of the hunters

The social position of the hunters and their political and financial influence make tackling the problem difficult.



NOTES : RESCUE OF AN OWLET AND RARE FOOD SOURCE OF CATTLE EGRETS. T.V. JOSE, 8, Reena Apts., Chincholi Bunder Road, Malad (W) Mumbai 400 064

Early one morning, I saw, among half a dozen crows cawing and flying excitedly, one jungle crow catching a bird in the air. The next moment the catcher and the caught reached the ground in a knot, while the others continued to fly over them. I rushed to the spot anticipating the sight of a helpless pied crested cuckoo, but what I saw was a southern spotted owl. On my approach the crows moved to a respectful distance. I looked all over the owl's body and saw no sign of injury. The owl stared right in my face as if it wanted to know what I was about.

Two minutes later, it flew through the boughs and twigs of a peepal tree and landed on a mango sapling. Soon the crows were upon it and the bird dodged them by its wavering flight. Again the jungle crow got the upper hand in the melee and knocked the owl down. I hurried to it and saw it lying with closed eyes.

I picked up the bird, and as I did I felt its extremely smooth and soft feathers. The bird was put in a cage, hurriedly made for it, and placed in the darkest corner of the room to avoid any disturbance. Then I offered it a dead mouse, obtained after a long hunt, and expected to see it eat it in its owlish way. But, to my disappointment, the bird paid no attention to the delicacy.

In the evening to have a better view of the owl I took it out of the cage. Sometimes it opened its eyes partly or fully. That was a comforting sight and I continued to watch. I stroked its head fondly, which resembled that of a kitten, and it

acknowledged my action by blissfully closing its eyes as a pet cat would do.

The fluffy body rested comfortably in my palm and showed no sign of getting out. At about 7.00 p.m. in the dim light of dusk I took the bird out to let it fly away if it wanted. For a minute or two I observed no change in its attitude. To encourage the little creature I stretched out my hand. Presently, I discerned that some energy was simmering up its little body. It straightened itself, cast a look at me that reflected a sudden surprise and suspicion. Then it looked around and finally flew on to the tip of a plantain leaf which bend under the weight and gave way. So it had to fly farther and was lost to my sight in the gathering night.

Rare food source for Cattle Egrets

Cattle egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*), as we all know, are birds that find their food on land, not in trees. I have, however, seen them feeding on insects visiting flower heads of mango trees (*Mangifera indica*). Now on 24th October 1998, I observed these birds apparently feeding on the same variety of insects visiting flowers of a different kind of tree, namely, what is called in Marathi "Bore" (*Carissa carrandas* belonging to the family Apocynaceae).

What struck me about these birds is not the food that they found there, which may even be the same they used to feed on elsewhere, but their uncanny ability to locate the source of food at a most unlikely place high up in a tree.

It is significant that the occurrence of this source of food is limited in time scale to once in a year and only for a day or two each time. Yet they do not fail to avail of the opportunity.



FOREST WAGTAILS IN MADRAS CHRISTIAN COLLEGE CAMPUS, TAMBARAM. S. THEODORE BASKARAN, 'Amaravathi', 9/1, 24th East St, Tiruvanmiyur, Chennai 600 041

On 1.10.98, we saw two forest wagtails *Motacilla indica* in the Madras Christian College campus, about 30 km from Chennai. We were at the International guest house, sitting in the verandah and nursing our morning coffee. Calls of ioras and chloropsis provided the background music. There was a flock of white-headed babblers hopping around, not far from where we were sitting. We saw a wagtail at the edge of the scrub jungle that surrounds this guest house. When we looked through the binoculars it resolved into a forest wagtail. As I was watching this bird, another forest wagtail joined and both were in that spot for quite some time. It is quite rare to see two of these birds together. The last time I saw a forest wagtail in Chennai was in 1974 when I sighted one in Guindy Deer park. A distinct character of this bird is other than the zebra-making, is that it wags its tail side to side laterally, unlike the other wagtails that move the tail up and down. There is a record of the forest wagtail breeding in Assam.

This 500 acre campus of MCC is mostly scrub jungle. Such scrubland once extended to long stretches along the coast. Fortunately this patch has survived in Tambaram. It is home to many birds and the Statistics department, of which Dr. Gift Siromoney was the head for a long time, has brought out a Checklist of Birds of MCC Campus.

Dr. Siromoney was a regular contributor to the Newsletter and is remembered by birdwatchers for his piece on the vultures that visit the temple at Tirukazhukunram near Chennai.



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The Bell Tolls for Cock Robin

Paul Evans

It was the robin that marked year's end for me. On the eve of the winter solstice, cutting ever-greens for decorations, the body of a robin fell at my feet. His wings held slivers of ice, one eye open, one closed, feet clenched. His red breast, messed up down one side, remained defiantly aflame. I held his body in the vain hope that warmth might revive him. But his ferocious life had gone and his body felt ominously heavy. A bad omen?

The ubiquitous image of the robin, which pops up in greetings cards and Christmas decorations, is the totem bird of the festive season in Britain. Like the protective plants - holly, ivy and mistletoe - the robin is an ancient guardian spirit. Perhaps its significance began when the bird, which stayed close to wild boar, taking advantage of their rooting in the forest to snatch worms and insects, adopted us for the same purpose when we domesticated pigs and began cultivation.

The robin has always held a special place in our affections, a sort of wild pet, the gardener's friend, and by Jacobean times was hailed as "The bird whom man loves best/The pious bird with the scarlet breast". For centuries the robin's wildness and liberty was regarded as more or less sacred and treated with cautious respect: "A Robin Red breast in a Cage/Puts all Heaven in a Rage", wrote William Blake.

But like the character of the robin itself - admired for being fiercely territorial and keen on gardening - its symbolism is not as pretty and festive as it now appears. In one mythological cycle at this time of year the Oak King, symbolised by the wren, is killed by the Holly King, symbolised by the New Year robin, on St Stephen's Day. So what happens when the Holly King dies instead? "Who killed cock robin? All the birds of the air fell a-sighting and a-sobbing, when they heard the bell toll for poor cock robin." Does the death of the robin portend an omen of environmental catastrophe? With a new year that already reads like an emergency telephone number and pre-millennial tension gaining critical mass, the old auguries, omens and superstitions based on nature will appear more significant in the light of environmental change. But we should not expect the lives of wild creatures to exist as fortune tellers any more

than we should expect our rational understanding of the world to accommodate our desire for mystery and myth.

It's not surprising that we cluster our myths and festivals at the end of the year. They distract us from the weirdness of these quick, thin days that flicker into history. A few days after I found the dead robin the rain came in fitful storms. A hurricane hit Ireland and gales tore across Scotland and England, causing flooding, damage and more deaths than the infamous storm of 1987.



On Boxing Day evening, which is also St Stephen's Day, when the robin is supposed to kill the wren, I walked up through the woods to the top of Wenlock Edge. The moon, waxing towards the first full moon of the new year, shone in puddles along the squelchy path. The rain stopped, the skies cleared and the wind began to build. I could hardly stand as a huge burst of wind along the Edge made the hedges growl, hurtling towards the orange glow of Telford away to the north. Throughout the night the wind battered the Edge under clear starlit sky. Strange days indeed.

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Cover : **Red-wattled Lapwing** (*Vanellus indicus*). A sleek, immaculate bird in a sandy brown suit, black cap and bright red wattle around the base of the beak, frequents open country side. Nests on the ground by making a scrape and lining with mud pellets or pebbles. Eggs and chicks are superbly camouflaged. Its ceaseless vigilance and frantic screaming 'did-he-do-it, why-did-he-do-it', is a familiar call of the country side.

Photo : S. Sridhar, ARPS